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IRVINE WEEKLY

DECEMEBER 17, 2021 • VOL. 4 • NO. 3

IRVINE TURNS 50

OUR CITY CELEBRATES A HALF-CENTURY OF INNOVATION IN ORANGE COUNTY

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COVER: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE.

IRVINE FORMS INNOVATION COUNCIL

WITH 18 REPRESENTATIVES, NEW COUNCIL WILL SOLIDIFY THE CITY'S FUTURE AS OC'S INNOVATION HUB.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE.

Continuing its path toward future innovations in Irvine, the city has recently announced the launch of Orange County's first Innovation Council. With 18 representatives, Irvine's Innovation Council has sought relationships with Google, CerraCap Ventures, UCI Beall Applied Innovation, FivePoint and several other Irvine-based companies leading innovations.

On Wednesday, Dec. 8, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan was joined in the Irvine City Hall Council Chambers to announce the launch of the city's Innovation Council, which aims to solidify the city's tenure as a hub for the creation and development of cutting-edge technology in Orange County.

"As the city of Irvine celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and we look ahead to the future, there is no doubt that our next chapter will be defined by our growing prominence in technology and innovation," Khan said. "I am excited to announce I have established an Innovation Council made up of representatives from business, education, and government that will identify actions we can take to ensure Irvine is positioned to be a regional hub of innovation and technology."

Khan called it a legacy project that will serve as an incubator to attract scalable technology businesses and aid in the development of new technologies locally.

"The goal is to create a collaborative action plan to not only help attract, retain and support scalable sustainable and high-growth technology businesses in our city," she said. "But also foster a pipeline of creativity and innovation from our young talent."

Abhi Mukherjee, Operating Partner with CerraCap Ventures, an Irvine-based venture capital firm that invests in health care, cyber security and AI solutions for large organizations globally, said it's important to focus on bringing start-ups and "disruptive technologies," and hopes the Innovation Council will be a conduit for those goals.

"Irvine embodies innovation and this Innovation Council has all the necessary partners and ingredients – with CerraCap Ventures bringing the start-ups," Mukherjee said. "Now we just need the right recipe to bring forward the best technologies and innovation to the city we love, Irvine."

Errol Arkilic, Executive Director and Chief Innovation Officer at UCI Beall Applied Innovation, spoke during Wednesday's press conference about this public-private opportunity. As part of his role at UCI Beall Applied Innovation, Arkilic added that his goal is to facilitate that opportunity into action.

"My job is to facilitate and transfer that knowledge through the creation of startups and through commercialization, research and licensing," Arkilic said. "We do that through a number of mechanisms, but primarily by bringing resources, market opportunity talent and knowledge to the table."

As an Rl research institute, UC Irvine serves as a cornerstone of knowledge and innovation within the community, and Arkilic hopes to harness that creativity even more.

"Knowledge creation is at the core of our experience. Increasingly that core research and commercialization activity becomes one," Arkilic said. "Dissemination of knowledge into products and services is critical to innovation, and what this council will help ensure."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE

AT 50, IRVINE CELEBRATES A HALF-CENTURY OF INNOVATION IN ORANGE COUNTY

AS IRVINE FINISHES A YEAR'S WORTH OF CELEBRATIONS FOR ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY, THE CITY RECENTLY HELD A SYMPOSIUM WITH SOME OF IRVINE'S ORIGINAL FOUNDERS TO DISCUSS THE DECADES OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES ACCOMPLISHED BY THE ORIGINAL "CITY OF TOMORROW."

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

A gathering place. A cultural center. A space for local small businesses to flourish. A home to world-class education. A technology and innovation hub where companies like Google, Ingram Micro, Blizzard and Amazon have offices. A diverse community. The home of the Great Park and its iconic orange balloon. It's a metropolitan landscape where soccer moms and dads come together to watch their children grow and entrepreneurs choose to start and grow businesses.

Some believe Irvine became a futuristic, metropolitan city by happenstance. Yet as one of the world's most meticulously master-planned communities, the leaders that shaped the city and the people who call it home know it is no coincidence that 50 years since its founding, Irvine is flourishing now more than ever.

Fifty years ago, prior to the city's incorporation in 1971, the city's master plan was nothing but a glimmer in the eye of former Irvine planner Ray Watson, who would enlist the assistance of renowned

architect and UC Irvine developer William Pereira.

Both Watson and Pereira's work within Irvine – Watson on Irvine's General Plan and Pereira's on UC Irvine – would be recognized nationally with Time Magazine coverage, as many were taking note at the time of what was taking place in Southern California long before Irvine's 50th birthday.

Over the five previous decades, though, Irvine went through many transitions. Long before it was the master-planned city with the 300,000 plus residents it houses today, it was known for pastures of rolling hills, citrus orchards and lima beans. In fact, the land we now know as Irvine was such a major agricultural site for producing lima beans that it was once a top producer of the beans globally.

But World War II changed the trajectory of the city. As a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor and resulting entry of the U.S. into World War II, the once agricultural land was swiftly transformed into Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, a base for training pilots and other military personnel, and a debarkation location for overseas deployment.

Despite the war ending, Irvine's El Toro base remained active until its official closure in July 1999.

After the base was put to rest, the broader county community and city were at odds on what to do with the land. From airport proposals to housing developments, ideas bounced around for years – as did the political battles. But, in 2001, the future of the site was determined (by way of a ballot measure) to turn the former marine base into an ambitious park, the Great Park.

Parks have always played an important role in the fabric of Irvine. In fact, even at the inception of the University of California, Irvine, a park was at the forefront of it.

At a recent symposium celebrating the 50th anniversary of the city's birthday, Brian Pratt, UC Irvine Associate Vice Chancellor and Campus Architect, reminded us that the school's development plan originally drew controversy because most college campuses were centered around a quad or a plaza, but UC Irvine was to be centered around Aldrich Park.

"It was ranch land and it really took vision to imagine what could be. They embarked on this master plan that considered a park in the center – Aldrich Park – really based on some of the principles from Frederick Law Olmsted and Central Park in New York," he said. "I have to believe that at the time nobody imagined that this plan could last and be as robust as it has proven to be as the campus has grown to over 35,000 students."

Today, parks are synonymous with the city, but while they are part of the fabric that defines Irvine, they also come with their own set of struggles and controversies.

While Aldrich Park was controversial for its time, the early years of the development of the Great Park were wrought with controversy and tribulation. From Grand Jury investigations, to political shenanigans, to accusations of the misuse of park funds, to the 2008 great recession, many wondered if Irvine's Great Park would ever be built and reach its potential.

In 2013, in another defining moment for the city, Irvine's City Council approved a game-changing deal with community builder FivePoint in which the city would grant land entitlements for home construction and FivePoint would build and pay for the development of a large portion of the park, a vision that was spearheaded by FivePoint's then-CEO Emile Haddad.

While parks have been commonplace in the history and growth of Irvine, so too have been home builders like Haddad with seemingly larger-than-life visions for what cities and community spaces can become. FivePoint, in recent years, has been a modern driving force in building Irvine. Earlier in the city's history, the Irvine Company shaped the city's housing development and its shopping experiences, like the Irvine Spectrum.

For Irvine though, the key has been sticking to its commitment to its master plan. In order for Irvine – a city that Pereira called the *City of Tomorrow* – to achieve the success it has today, many credit Watson and Pereira's execution of the master plan and the strict implementation of that plan by the city over the years.

Echoing those sentiments, Jeff Davis, Vice President of the Irvine Company, while a panelist at the 50th-anniversary symposium, said, "It all goes back to that fundamental foundation that were the key components of both the Pereira's master plan as well as the city's general plan when it was adopted."

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan sees Irvine's master plan as a "living document."

"We probably wouldn't be the city we are today without a master plan. That started it all and continues to help guide us," she said. "It's a living document."

As the city has done many times before, its evolution continues today as it embarks on the creation of a billion-dollar medical infrastructure with City of Hope and UCI Health while continuously maintaining thousands of acres of preserved open space and natural areas through the Irvine Ranch Conservancy.

At its 50th birthday, it would seem Irvine has, in many ways, been living up to its moniker: "The city of tomorrow."

(Tara Finley contributed to this article)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COUNTY OF ORANGE.

'FLAG ONE' PRESENTATION

CEREMONY HELD AT PLANNED GYPSUM CANYON VETERANS CEMETERY SITE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Wednesday, Dec. 8, more than 200 people, along with the Orange County Board of Supervisors, attended a Flag One groundbreaking ceremony at the potential site for a veterans cemetery in Gypsum Canyon.

With nearly 250 in attendance, in addition to unfurling a 60' x 30' American flag and planting a flagpole, the Gold Star Mothers National Chaplain, representing the mothers of the men and women killed in combat, held a prayer in recognition of the fallen soldiers and the veterans who will be placed to rest within the 280-acre site.

Dressed in all white, Elaine Brattain led an invocation, with a verse from Isaiah 6:8:

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

"One day we will walk among this garden of stones and know that below them lay America's sons and daughters who were willing to pay the price of freedom," Brattain said. "As we unfurl 'Flag One' may we remember the significance of her colors, white for purity and innocence, red for hardiness and valor, and blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice; just as every flag will cover our veterans."

While the Gypsum Canyon cemetery project has yet to be inked with the state, Nick Berardino, a Vietnam War veteran, and president of the Veterans Alliance of Orange County (VALOR), said the Flag One presentation was meant to signify a final resting place for Orange County veterans in Gypsum Canyon, and is all but official.

"I think now the buttoning up of legislation needs to occur, but the Legislature knows what the entire community of Orange County wants, this cemetery built in Gypsum Canyon," Berardino said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "As far as the veterans community is concerned we are not moving off of this hill."

After more than 10 years of debate in Irvine, which voted 4-1 to support the new site, the Gypsum Canyon veterans cemetery quickly gained the support of county supervisors. In July, the county allocated $20 million toward the proposed cemetery project.

Now there is additional legislative support from Senator Tom Umberg.

On Dec. 8, Umberg and Assemblymember Tom Daly debuted amendments to Senate Bill 43, which will allow the California Veterans Association to work with the city of Anaheim to perform feasibility studies on the proposed site in Gypsum Canyon.

"Finding the right location for this cemetery has been a cumbersome – but absolutely vital part of this process," Umberg said. "After discussions with CalVet, it has become clear that any new potential site will need a thorough state examination and analysis. I'm thrilled the county has made a financial commitment towards this process and our veterans and I'm happy to use SB 43 for this feasibility study."

On Friday, Dec. 10. Irvine City Councilmember Larry Agran spoke to *Irvine Weekly*, adding that he foresees a lengthy timeline in terms of studies and approval.

"There's a tremendous effort afoot to abandon the ARDA site, and instead relocate the veterans cemetery at the Gypsum Canyon site – even though the Gypsum Canyon site hasn't been studied," Agran said. "I think we're looking at probably – at the earliest – two to three years before the Gypsum Canyon Site could gain the necessary approvals."

While more than 30 city councils in Orange County voted in favor of the Gypsum canyon site, Agran's vote was the only vote against adopting the site in the county, during Irvine's vote in October.

GREAT PARK BOARD APPROVES $5.7 MILLION PARTNERSHIP WITH UCI HEALTH

THE 10-YEAR PARTNERSHIP ALSO INCLUDES TWO, FIVE-YEAR EXTENSIONS, WHICH WOULD GENERATE MORE THAN $13 MILLION OVER THE NEXT TWO DECADES.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

After previously delaying a decision on a sponsorship partner for the Great Park earlier this year, the Great Park Board approved a $5.7 million presenting sponsorship agreement with UCI Health on Tuesday, Nov. 23. The 10-year sponsorship agreement will come with the addition of "As Presented By UCI Health" on Great Park signage and bring several co-branded wellness events and seminars to Irvine.

In a 4-0 vote, the board unanimously approved the new partnership contract, which was originally written as a "sponsorship" and amended to "partnership" after director Larry Agran expressed reservations about the terminology.

"The sponsors, the owners, the operators of the Great Park, it's we the people – people of Irvine, historically, to some extent the people of Orange County," he said. "I'm troubled by the word sponsorship."

During the meeting, Pamela Baird, Director of Community Services for the Great Park, explained that all final language could be altered for consideration if the directors wished to do so.

"I believe that the logo is still being updated, and will be shared with the Great Park Board for consideration, and we could definitely make some adjustments at that time to change that to 'collaborated with UCI Health,'" Baird said.

Earlier this year, the board opted to pause on making a decision on this agreement, with Anthony Kuo and Director Tammy Kim voicing concerns about exclusivity, while bringing into question the city's ability to host alternative sponsorships within different sections of the Great Park. Kuo said that concept would be feasible.

"This notion that sponsorship applies to existing parts of the park, and that future parts of the park could be under different sponsorship – with due respect, I just don't buy that," Kuo said on Tuesday, Sept. 23 meeting. "No one's going to say, 'This is the sponsorship for the Great Park, or this is the sponsorship for Great Park South.'"

Irvine has been searching for a presenting sponsorship since February 2020, when it enlisted the services of the Superlative Group, a corporate sponsorship and naming rights analytics firm.

The Superlative Group began outreach for this specific partnership in March 2020, targeting local, regional and national organizations. A staff report included in the November 23 agenda indicated that UCI Health emerged as the "preferred" candidate, "with the highest financial offer most advantageous to the city."

In terms of revenue, the contract with UCI Health includes a $500,000 investment over the first year, with a 3 percent annual escalator. The contract also includes two additional five-year extension periods, which would bring the contract to a 20-year duration, with total compensation of $13,435,187.

Per the contract, Superlative will be provided a 10 percent commission on annual sponsorship payments.

In addition to UCI Health covering some of the costs for new and updated signage, the partnership would also bring more discussion around the construction of the Botanical Garden and the expansion of Irvine's Farm + Food Lab.

Brian O'Dea, Executive Director of Marketing and Communication with UCI Health, said that as a health care provider in Orange County, entering a partnership with the Great Park is an accomplishment that encapsulates UCI Health's core mission and values.

"When this opportunity was presented to us it just seemed like such a natural fit. As a health care provider to sponsor a park – where so much athleticism takes place, so much exercise takes place, was something that we're interested in," O'Dea said. "But another thing that caught our attention was the agenda item for the botanical garden, which also is a wonderful addition to the [Great] Park and the city."

With the recent groundbreaking of UCI Health's $1.3 billion medical complex in Irvine, which will include a 144-bed acute care hospital with an emergency room, along with the outpatient Center for Advanced Care and the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center and Ambulatory Care building, UCI Health wants to continue to provide cutting edge health care in Irvine, while strengthening relationships locally.

"We're building a second medical center in Irvine. We're an Irvine-based health care provider, we want to be a good neighbor," O'Dea added.

In terms of other benefits, UCI Health plans to host a variety of health and wellness events for the public, and specifically focus on Irvine's senior population. The partnership also indicates that UCI Health will provide strategic guidance on health-related practices to the city of Irvine.

COME FLY WITH ME

JESSE ARMS BOTKE'S MURALS AND PAINTINGS EVOKE A TROPICAL WORLD FILLED WITH BIRDS AND FLORA.

BY LIZ GOLDNER

A magnificent 26-foot-wide mural adorns Laguna Art Museum's exhibition of work by 20th-century artist Jesse Arms Botke. Her "Untitled Mural From The East Wall," an oil on canvas with gold leaf, depicts a tropical paradise with pink flamingos, pelicans, herons and other birds, set among colorful foliage and flowers.

While viewing this iconic mural, Jean Stern, Director Emeritus, The Irvine Museum, related a heartwarming story about its creation and rescue. Botke (1883-1971) painted the mural in 1955 for the Oaks Hotel in Ojai. As it was installed in the hotel lobby, the mural suffered damage over the years due to occasional contact from people walking by.

In 1996, the hotel removed the mural and it was soon after donated to the Irvine Museum. After several months of detailed restoration, including re-installing the gold leaf, the mural was delivered to the museum. But as the nascent venue was then located on the 12th floor of an office building, the rolled-up mural was too big for the elevator, and it was temporarily installed at a UC Irvine venue. Soon after, the museum was re-located to the ground floor, and the mural was subsequently displayed there in three exhibitions where it became a major attraction, especially with children who often counted the number of birds within it.

As a centerpiece in Laguna Art Museum's current Botke exhibition, the untitled mural reveals what Stern refers to as the intent to dazzle the eye with line, form, detail, color, elegance and patterned and stylized forms.

More than two dozen Botke paintings displayed in the museum's front gallery complement and enhance the mural. These include "Crowned Pigeons," a detailed illustration of three large blue birds, proudly wearing feathery crowns. "Macaw & Cockatoos" features four white cockatoos surrounding a bold macaw as it spreads its wings. "Untitled Flamingos" is a riot of the pink birds spreading their wings, as flowers around them reflect their colors. "Cockatoos and Easter Lily Vine" includes exceptional details of bird wings and feathers along with flowers and foliage that seem to burst from the canvas. And the majestic "White Necked Cranes" in dark gray provides a counterpoint to the colorful paintings. Other birds in her work and in this show include peacocks, ducks, swans, geese, pheasants and toucans.

Jesse Arms Botke, Flamingos oil on board. The Irvine Museum Collection at UCI

Visiting the Laguna Art Museum gallery, viewing so many finely wrought paintings of birds, can feel like a quick trip to the Everglades. Spend enough time there and you can almost hear the tropical birds cooing, crowing and making a racket.

Laguna Art Museum has installed numerous exhibitions of work by 20th-century artists. But "A Fanciful World: Jesse Arms Botke," with paintings from the same period, differs from previous museum shows, which have included important pieces by impressionist artists. While those California painters used broad brush strokes and pure, bright colors to illustrate the bucolic SoCal landscape, many Botke pieces are inspired by the Art Deco style, which is characterized by precise, linear and dynamic images and often by exotic subjects. Her primarily representational work is also influenced by medieval tapestries with their intricate designs and abundance of flowers, foliage and trees, and by the centuries-old method of applying gold and silver leaf to paintings to add luster and shimmer.

Botke, born in Chicago in 1883, began attending art classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1897, and later attended the Art Institute full-time. While painting in her spare time, she worked as a book illustrator and interior decorator for major firms in Chi-

Jesse Arms Botke, Crowned Pigeons oil on board. The Irvine Museum Collection at UCI

Jesse Arms Botke, Macaw Cockatoos oil and gold leaf on canvas. The Irvine Museum Collection at UCI

Jesse Arms Botke, Untitled Mural From The East Wall (part) oil and gold leaf on canvas. The Irvine Museum Collection at UCI

cago and New York City, often designing tapestries and creating murals for hotels, universities and private homes. She also traveled to Europe where she met the Spanish impressionist Joaquin Sorolla.

As Botke evolved as an artist, she became recognized for her remarkable ability to accurately depict birds of all kinds. And after moving to California with her husband Cornelis Botke, she took advantage of the warm climate here, observing and photographing birds at the San Diego Zoo and on her own ranch in Santa Paula. (Several birds that she illustrated are now extinct.)

Throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when Botke was able to paint full-time, her scintillating art pieces were shown across this country in galleries and museums, particularly in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. In fact, she was blazing her own artistic path. Inspired by her early professional work, by the various art movements burgeoning around her, by her travels and especially by her love of nature, she produced a unique body of work.

Illustrators throughout the ages have accurately drawn and painted birds, most notably John James Audubon. Yet Jesse Arms Botke's paintings – which also depict birds faithfully – eclipse their work with her aesthetic perceptions and flair.

Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach; Mon.-Tue., Thur.-Sun., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; "A Fanciful World: Jessie Arms Botke" on view through January 16, 2022. lagunaartmuseum.org

Jesse Arms Botke, Hidden Kingdom oil and gold leaf on panel. The Hilbert Collection

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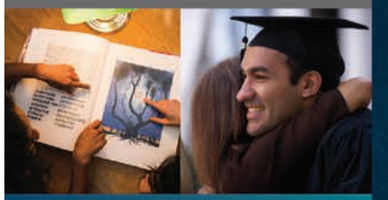

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IRVINE BARCLAY PRESENTS THE NUTCRACKER WITH FESTIVAL BALLET THEATRE

BY SAM MACHADO

Festival Ballet Theatre Performs The Nutcracker at Irvine Barclay Theatre

PHOTO CREDIT SKYE SCHMIDT

Irvine is getting in touch with its holiday roots with the classic ballet *The Nutcracker*. Currently playing at Irvine Barclay Theatre, audiences can see live performances from now all the way till December 24. Irvine fans will be drawn in with Tchaikovsky's score as they see the Sugar Plum Fairy, Clara and multiple characters on breathtaking adventures.

The Nutcracker takes on the story of Clara who befriends a Nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve. He takes her on a whimsical adventure while fighting the evil Mouse King and befriending new characters along the way. Some of the most well-known numbers include "Waltz of the Flowers," "Trepak" and "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy." Artistically directed by Festival Ballet Theatre's Salwa Rizkalla, this production features professional company dancers.

Aimee Cho, starring as Clara, explained in an exclusive interview with *Irvine Weekly* that *The Nutcracker* has always been special to her ever since the first time she watched it at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. "I was just so inspired by all the amazing dancers and the production in general. Watching it really put me in the Christmas spirit and made me excited to do *The Nutcracker*, myself."

Cho said that while this production of *The Nutcracker* will take on its traditional roots, there will also be some added flair. Cho also said that she loves playing Clara because of her character's involvement throughout the show. "Growing up, I would love to watch all of the pieces on the sides, but being able to share the stage with all the amazing dancers just brings joy to me. Getting the opportunity to perform Clara this year is such a blessing. I am excited to share my love for Christmas to others through what I love to do every day."

From a young age, Cho had begged her parents to put her in a dance class. She started at the age of seven and has remained a dancer ever since. Now, she continues to follow her passion in one of the most beloved stories ever told.

"Nutcracker season is my favorite time during the whole year," Cho tells us. "Being in the theater and doing what I love for others always brings a smile to me. I love to perform. Performing for a live audience makes me feel alive and I am always at my happiest when I am dancing the Nutcracker at the Barclay!"

Jerry Mandel, president of the Barclay, also said that he's humbled to bring *The Nutcracker* to the theatre after two years away from the stage.

"This annual set of performances is one of the best illustrations of the Barclay's reason for being: bringing the community together," Mandel says. "We treasure our longstanding partnership with Festival Ballet Theatre's Artistic Director Salwa Rizkalla, her company, and her talented guest dancers. For nearly 15 years we have been pleased to help celebrate generations of young dancers from Orange County and their families who together make *The Nutcracker* at the Barclay not just a holiday classic, but a beloved community tradition."

Audience members over the age of 12 must show proof of vaccination status or a negative Covid test to attend. Masks will also be required at all times inside the Barclay. Children from 3-12 may attend, but must wear masks at all times.

Tickets for *The Nutcracker* can be purchased at thebarclay.org, by calling the box office at 949-854-4646 or by email at tickets@thebarclay.org.

Festival Ballet Theatre performs The Nutcracker

PHOTO CREDIT DAVE FRIEDMAN

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- Jim and Carol Hoffman

'TIS ALWAYS THE SEASON FOR STEAK IN IRVINE

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

There's something about the holiday season that evokes the craving for hearty dishes and oversized cuts of meat – especially steak. From T-bones to prime rib to wagyu, each cut is a different experience. Irvine is home to several unique steakhouses from all-you-can-eat Brazilian style eateries to historic prime rib destinations in Orange County. With the holiday season coming to a close, be sure to celebrate steak one last time in 2021.

GULLIVER'S PRIME RIB

Offering luscious slabs of juicy prime rib three different ways, Gulliver's has spent decades perfecting its menu. From the thinly sliced English cut to the gigantic "Brobdingnagian" cut served with the bone in, along with in-house aged steak, there's no shortage of rare cuts of beef at Gulliver's. Gulliver's Restaurant has been a prime rib destination since opening in 1971. Located across the street from John Wayne Airport, the establishment was known to be frequented by John Wayne himself. Gulliver's is one of the oldest restaurants in Orange County and the oldest in Irvine. Not much has changed inside Gulliver's since opening. The restaurant still maintains the 18th-century English theme, with a dimly lit tavern atmosphere, set to resemble an English roadside Inn.

AGORA CHURRASCARIA

If you like the idea of being served sizzling hot steak, sliced off the skewer, then Agora Churrascaria is the place for you. With a dozen cuts of meat, this Brazilian steakhouse serves beef, pork, lamb and chicken. Guests can signal their desire for additional meat with the use of a green ticket, left on the table which encourages the waiters to bring more meat. Once the ticket is flipped to the red side, the meal will come to an end.

TWENTY EIGHT RESTAURANT AND BAR

If you happen to overlook the char siu glazed Heritage Pork Shoulder, Twenty Eight's Asian-inspired dish served with fried bao buns, be sure not to miss the two beautiful cuts of Japanese and American Wagyu at the very top of the steak menu. While guests may lose themselves in the mouth-watering awe of a sizzling slice of Japanese A5 Wagyu Ribeye "Snow Beef," Kevin Ho, General Manager and Sommelier of Twenty Eight OC', said this meat-forward menu is meant to entice. Aside from the real-world culinary splendor of its fare, Twenty Eight offers a collection of rare Napa Valley wine labels, along with an emphasis on the education of both American and Japanese whiskey/whisky spirits, paired with one of the strongest, high-quality whiskey collections in Orange County.

BISTANGO

Irvine Weekly's Liz Goldner writes that Bistango, located in the Atrium Building in Irvine, near the former Irvine Museum, was a venue designed by Venice-based architect Michael Carapetian as a combination restaurant and art gallery. Owned by the late John Ghoukassian, Bistango has exhibited art on its walls since its inception, while serving food that Ghoukassian called "new American cuisine." With four different cuts of steak – prime angus ribeye steak, prime angus New York steak, grilled grass-fed filet mignon, and prime angus flat iron streak – Antoinette Sullivan, curator of Bistango's art shows for more than 30 years, explains, "We presented our first art exhibition there at the restaurant's opening in November 1987. We have hosted over 120 art shows displaying more than a thousand artists from Southern California and around the world."

RUTH'S CHRIS STEAKHOUSE

Originally founded in New Orleans in 1965, a woman named Ruth Fertel can be credited for founding the steakhouse, along with the cooking method in which streaks are prepared each day in Ruth's Chris Steakhouse Kitchens. In her discovery, Fertel found that a 500-degree plate loaded with butter gets the steak hot and flavorful until the last bite. In order to achieve this method every time, Fertel designed a proprietary1800-degree broiler that's still used today. Ruth's Chris features nearly a dozen different cuts of beef, including a 16 oz. bone-in filet, a bone-in New York strip, and classic T-Bone.

PAUL MARTIN'S AMERICAN GRILL

Located in the Irvine Spectrum, Paul Martin's American Grill house specialties include a 14 oz. blackened ribeye, a southern-fried New York Strip, served with sherry black pepper gravy, mashed potatoes, garlic green beans, and a classic center-cut Filet Mignon. While the menu at Paul Martin's isn't centered around steak, these well-known cuts are available anytime, making a go-to lunch or dinner any time of year.

GREEN-FINGERED JAZZ

RACHEL ECKROTH SPENDS TIME IN THE GARDEN

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

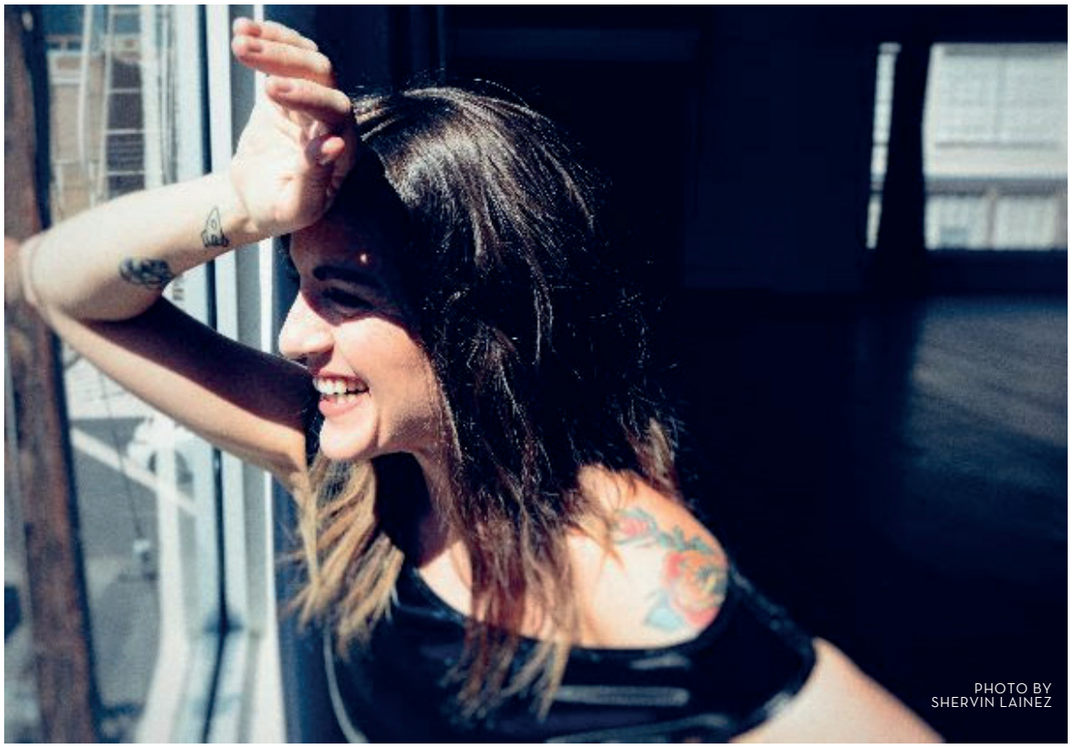

PHOTO BY SHERVIN LAINEZ

Grammy-nominated keyboardist, singer and songwriter Rachel Eckroth is in the midst of a super-productive career spell. The Arizona native, who had a six-year stint in Southern California between Phoenix and her now-home of Tucson, has just released a new solo album called *The Garden*. Not only that, but she's the keyboardist in St. Vincent's band, and Rufus Wainwright's too.

These are the days that need to be enjoyed. There are few more exciting artists in popular music today than Annie Clark, a fact that Eckroth gets to enjoy night after night. But she's no mere sideperson. Eckroth is an accomplished solo artist and bandleader with four albums, an EP and a number of singles under her belt. *The Garden* is the latest, recorded back in her home state.

"We just left L.A. because of the pandemic," Eckroth says. "I moved to L.A. in 2016, just for a few reasons. I was living in New York, and New York was done for me at the time. I had met my husband [bassist Tim Lefebvre], and he lived in L.A., so that was a good reason to move out to L.A. Plus to be somewhere warm."

Interestingly, the couple chose to live in Tucson rather than Phoenix when she returned to Arizona.

"It's such a beautiful place," Eckroth says. "We're living on the edge of the desert, just out in nature. I went to school here when I was 18, so I knew a little bit about Tucson and I knew how cool and beautiful it was. So when we were thinking of splitting L.A. when things went downhill last year, we just thought of Tucson and we found a really cool place to stay."

Eckroth says that she's always been a bandleader, having had a piano trio in her twenties.

"I was always composing and writing, and then I started songwriting when I was about 30," she says. "The progression of how it all went was, I've always been a leader and creating my own gigs and shows, and I guess it was always that way from the beginning. But I've also been a side-man a lot of the time too. It all came in different forms."

She was about 15 when she discovered jazz, joining the high school jazz band and going to jazz camp for the summer.

"I learned so much about harmony and improvisation, and playing with people," she says. "As a pianist, you grow up not playing with other musicians because you're at home practicing by yourself. So it was really fun to be in a band and actually make music with other people. I started studying jazz and getting to know the musicians that came before and that are current. I just really loved the improvisational aspect of it."

Eckroth lists Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner and Geri Allen among her major influences, and she refers to her sound as "beyond jazz," something that's apparent on the new album.

"There's a heavy electronic presence there," she says. "It's not electronica, but there's a lot of effects and stuff that we played with in the studio. Live, and during mixing. It's *The Garden*, so it has a garden theme. Every song has a different botanical theme and title to it, which was something that sort of occurred to me while I was writing the album. Because it was me pulling from all the seeds that I sowed throughout my career, style-wise and all the things I learned about arranging and composing. I put them in this record, and so it just felt right to call it a garden because everything was a little bit different. A bunch of different sounds, different plants, all in one place."

The artist says that working with the likes of St. Vincent and Rufus Wainwright inevitably influences her own music.

"I love to see pros doing what they do," she says. "Everybody just does it to such a high degree, and you can tell who's really a great person or a professional person by the way they treat their band. Both of those artists really treat their bands well. So I guess I try to mimic that, do the same thing. I take their work ethic and try to do the same thing when I'm working."

The St. Vincent connection, much like anything else these days, came about thanks to an online message thread.

"My husband Tim, who is the bass player on the record and also the producer, he's friends with Justin Meldal-Johnsen who is a bass player who played with Beck for a long time, and he's a producer," she says. "We were chatting on a thread, and Justin was looking for a female keyboardist that plays the vintage keyboards. A bunch of people on there shouted out my name. That's basically how it happened. They were looking for somebody and there I was."

It's got to be a thrill, performing in front of enormous crowds and doing TV spots. It's a similar story with Rufus Wainwright.

"I did a record in 2018 and the guitarist Gerry Leonard was a David Bowie musician," she says. "He played on my record, and then down the road, he remembered that I have a solo project and am also a keyboard player. He happened to be the musical director for Rufus' project that was happening. So they called me up and asked me to open for Rufus and play in the band."

Gerry Leonard isn't the only Bowie connection to Eckroth either. Husband Lefebvre played bass on the great man's final album *Blackstar*, as did fellow collaborator Donny McCaslin.

"*Blackstar* has been playing in our house ever since – that's something ingrained into my body at this point," she says. "There's a lot of Bowie connects happening with my music."

Eckroth just played an L.A. show at Sam First and, looking ahead, she's hoping for more.

"We have about five dates happening before 2022, so we'll play music from *The Garden* and then next year booking a lot more of that," she says. "I'll be doing some new writing, and then eventually starting the summer touring with St. Vincent again."

Rachel Eckroth's The Garden *album is out now.*

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LET IT BEAT

PETER JACKSON'S THE BEATLES: GET BACK IS THE BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM OF 2021 AND MAYBE THE BEST REALITY TV SHOW OF ALL TIME.

BY LINA LECARO

On Thanksgiving weekend, *The Beatles: Get Back*, Peter Jackson's lovingly-crafted, laborious and layered three-part Beatles saga (which a lot of us are still thinking, talking and writing about) was finally released on Disney+. And as we ate our last slice of pumpkin pie watching the world's greatest, not rock n' roll band because for this writer, that's still the Stones, but the world's greatest *band period*, perform their last live show ever on a rooftop in England, everything about the experience felt significant, both on a cultural level and on a human level. Never has a holiday entertainment release been more perfectly planned, each episode debuting consecutively over three nights, and each evoking different impressions and emotions as the viewer committed to the fly-on-the-wall journey. At 8+ hours total, it took dedication to keep buzzing with the Beatles in this immersive, musically enlightening, not always pleasant but real way, but it was well worth it.

Culled from 60 hours of footage from Michael Lindsay-Hogg's *Let It Be* documentary (a film and recording John Lennon and Paul McCartney were not really happy with), Jackson's chronicle seeks to provide more context for the last two albums, the writing process and the band's breakup. The first part, a sort of surreal re-introduction to the four mythic beings also known as John, Paul, George and Ringo, was exciting to watch and absorb, from the strained dynamics of the band's members to the skeletal beginnings and evolution of songs we all know and love, to the look and sound of the footage, which Jackson restored beautifully, even splicing some portions of audio and video that didn't originally go together (for which he added a disclaimer) and adding subtitles to tell the real story.

Though the takeaways after the first part, set at Twickenham Studios, might have been mostly sorrow for George Harrison (for being shut out by McCartney during the writing process; Paul clearly only wanted to work out his music with John), Yoko Ono not surprisingly emerged as the most controversial player in the

PHOTO BY LINDA MCCARTNEY. © 2020 APPLE CORPS LTD.

project. For most, her omnipresence at the sessions was annoying at first. Yoko had a chair right alongside the band (well, John) at all times and the co-dependent relationship was off-putting for most of us, though many (mostly women) found it inspiring, true love caught on film and perhaps the ultimate embodiment of the artist/muse relationship. Either way, it was clearly inconsiderate and did not help or contribute to the task at hand. Or did it?

There's been a lot said about how this film proves that Ono didn't break up the band, and some have gone as far as to say she helped John stay longer than he might have. We saw it a bit differently. Yoko *was* a factor in the breakup of The Beatles, and *Get Back* does not show otherwise, it only reveals that it wasn't all on her shoulders. She was one of few different reasons the band imploded, but mostly, she embodied the fissure that had already started to emerge within the fab four. Disillusionment after years of insane fame, dealing with the aftermath of some bad business decisions, the death of their manager Brian Epstein, varying levels of drug use and monumental expectations going into the '70s were a recipe for strained band relations, to say the least. Maybe John needed Ono there for inspiration or as a buffer, or maybe he didn't (we'll never know), but within an already tense working atmosphere, it sent a message to the others that the Beatles brotherhood was no longer enough. The breakup wasn't her fault – if anything it was John's – but to say her presence didn't play into the band's problems is disingenuous, as is dismissing this opinion as simple misogyny.

Still, we went through the five stages of Yoko while watching: from surprise to annoyance to tolerance to acceptance to ultimately, appreciation for the bohe-

mian vibe and jammy informality she brought to the room, which by the second installment felt more relaxed, fun and ultimately productive. Part two is arguably the hardest to get through for non-fans though; we hear the same songs ("Let It Be," "I've Got A Feeling," "Two of Us") played again and again and again, and we see the band near delirious as they try to work everything out, including exactly what they will do once the music is ready. The TV show they planned got scraped, but they still wanted to give Hogg something climactic, and a mini-concert on the roof was ultimately what they came up with.

After essentially watching six hours of rehearsals, part three, which leads up to the final live performance outdoors, is emotional, knowing what we know. For hardcore music-lovers, even the repetitive parts are compelling, but if our social media feed is any indication, not enough for all. Yes, there are still Beatles haters out there and for a lot of us, seeing the naysayer posts upon the docuseries' release was eye-opening. What kind of soulless curmudgeon misses the beauty and magic of hanging out with the Beatles in creative mode for several hours, especially knowing that it will be their last time doing so together?

Watching the music and its creation is life-affirming stuff, even if you're just a casual Beatles fan. It's also wildly entertaining – from the exuberant jams with Billy Preston on keyboards to the fascinating interactions between George Martin, Glyn Johns, and Linda Eastman/McCartney and the band, to sneak peeks of music from the Beatles' past and future, to fabulous fashions worn by each member throughout all three sessions, to the candid conversations (some recorded without the Beatles knowledge) providing a voyeuristic look behind the music for real (those old VH1 docs could only dream of coming close). *Get Back* is transportive television, a mind-blowing flashback that might be long, and at times uncomfortable, but is ultimately the best chronicle ever of the creative process. It reminds us that humans may be flawed creatures, but we can create beauty in its truest and purest form. It's more than a music doc, it's reality TV at its most transcendent.

COURTESY 20TH CENTURY FOX

SPIELBERG'S WEST SIDE STORY IS A WONDERFULLY WORTHY UPDATE

BY ASHER LUBERTO

If you've ever wanted to see the man behind *Jaws*, *E.T.* and *Indiana Jones* tackle a musical, you're in luck. Even if you never knew you wanted that, you're still in luck, because Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story* is a straight-up blast.

With the help of co-writers Tony Kushner and Stephen Sondheim, Spielberg has dusted off Arthur Laurents' source material, once a Broadway play, and of course, Robert Wise's beloved musical from 1961. He's given it a modern update, addressing themes of racism and gentrification in new ways, but the basic formula remains the same.

As his adaptation swings around the flying limbs of gangs including the Sharks, the Jets and everyone caught in the middle, Spielberg not only shows off his craft, he also seems to be having a great time. Liberated from the confines of historical drama and Oscar-bait, it seems the filmmaker is giddy to be back in the mix, so we can forgive him for going overboard with a few scenes.

When we first meet the Jets, Lt. Schrank (Corey Stoll) lectures them about fighting with the Sharks, but he also mentions a slum-clearance project that will remove both gangs. The first shot of Manhattan is a nightmare, a mountain of rubble, dust and blood that will soon become a playground for hipsters and their precious coffee shops.

The film then shifts from de-saturated ruin to rich, Kodachrome color. The shift is dazzling for many reasons, mainly for what it says about Manhattan. At first, the town looks like a war zone. For those who live there, however, it's a land of opportunity, work, dance and life. Maria (Rachel Zegler) lives on the West Side, along with her sister, Anita (Ariana DeBose), and her sister's boyfriend, Bernardo (David Alvarez). They head to the dance, where Maria locks eyes with Tony (Ansel Elgort).

It's love at first sight, and the two begin a *Romeo & Juliet*-style romance – one a Jet and one a Shark, one White and one Puerto Rican. It's hot, humid and there's uncertainty in the air. Will Tony work up the courage to see Maria again? Will they meet on her balcony? Who can stop them? Who can stop these gangs from fighting? The familiar story plays out against the backdrop of a tight-knit but extremely fraught community, as love blossoms and death looms.

This will no doubt be a breakout performance for the impossibly tender and talented Zegler, who was discovered on YouTube. However, it's cinematographer Janusz Kaminski – who shot *War Horse* and *Lincoln* – who stuns in his first musical production. Who knew cameras could move like that or hues could pop like that?

With the late Sondheim's songs, and Spielberg's direction, everything snaps into place as effortlessly as a spool in a chain-link fence. There are Busby Berkeley-inspired musical numbers, a cast of thousands and characters bursting into song and dance at every moment. It's Spielberg at his best; the scale and narrative scope are large and the audience – lost in a haze of nostalgia – will likely finish it in tears.

Spielberg even made efforts to remove the racist undertones of the 1961 version casting Latin actors and adding a more multidimensional take on Puerto Rican life in New York. *West Side Story* is worth a theater visit (and however long the wait to stream). It's a vividly produced collage of performance, cinematography, romance and tragedy that fans of the original movie will love, maybe even more than its predecessor.

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